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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 14, 1995

BURL IVES

CHARLESTON, ILL. -- Most people have forgotten that Burl Ives, a native of Jasper County, was a fine football player for Eastern Illinois State College, now Eastern Illinois University, long before he became famous for "The Blue-Tailed Fly."

Ives, Eastern's most famous alumnus, died early Friday morning at his home in Anacortes, Wash. He was diagnosed with mouth cancer last summer. He slipped into a coma early Wednesday.

Ives, 85, attended Eastern from 1927-29 and in the summer of '30 and returned to his alma mater to perform on several occasions. He also did public service announcements to promote the Tarble Arts Center and has given the university an extensive collection of his albums and records.

"I think the fact that I'm from Illinois has a lot to do with what I'm about." Ives once said, "Even beyond music, the Midwest always was a very substantial part of who I am. I was born in the country, brought up with cornbread and milk and greens. That makes a big difference -- gives you stamina."

From 1927-29, Ives was a top-notch lineman for Eastern's

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football team. He was so outstanding, in fact, that in '29, his third year of varsity competition, he was named left guard on the All-Conference eleven.

He was considered the best tackle in the "Little 19" when the Panthers were conference champions and owned an uncrossed goal line.

Ives wanted to be first a preacher, then a football coach, when he attended Eastern and worked his way through school with restaurant jobs.

He majored in social sciences and music. He sang and worked in Charleston cafes, lived in a garage owned by Friederich Koch, head of the music department, paying rent by firing the furnace. Ives was a "campus personality" known to everyone in town. He appeared on chapel programs frequently, singing folk songs. This was during the regime of the famed Livingston C. Lord, first president of Eastern.

In fact, it was Lord, who sent Ives off to fame and fortune, although he probably didn't think so at the time.

Ives described the encounter during a press conference in later years, "I came back my third year, and the big magnet which drew me here was the football season because I loved to play football," he recalled. "I thought I was going to be a football coach. That was sort of in the back of my mind, I don't know why. You know how kids are -- some want to be firemen."

"But when I saw all the heat that the poor men have to endure

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to exist, I said, 'Well, that's no life for me, so I think I'd better stick with the guitar.'"

Knowing he wasn't going into education made him an indifferent student, Ives said. "I was called in to see Mr. Lord. He looked at my record. First year, pretty good. Second year, so-so. And the third year, less. He looked over and he said - these are the words - 'I believe you have too restless a spirit to be an educator. You'd better look around a little.'"

Even though he would graduate, if he stayed until June, Ives walked out and never went back. "My clothes and things were in the fraternity house, but I didn't want to bother with them," he said. "I just went off down the road."

In 1976, he came back a second time to Eastern and gave a performance that confirmed the legend of the "local boy made good." He sang before a near-capacity "Parent's Weekend" crowd in Lantz Gymnasium.

It was his second visit to the campus since he left the university. He first returned during the 1946 Eastern Homecoming - six years after his first national radio broadcasts.

Upon his return in 1985, the internationally known folk singer and actor appeared with his wife, Dorothy, as part of their tour to promote development and funding of the arts, using the theme of an "Imagination Celebration." "I want to thank you for the way you listened to my little songs," Ives said before closing. He also asked for a round of applause to thank his wife Dorothy, "for

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without her I couldn't make it."

Also, in 1985, he and Jim Roberts, a past president of the National Newspaper Association, joined forces to head a \$5 million fund drive for their alma mater.

Ives said, "I am most pleased to be offered the honorary chair position. I have fond and strong memories of Eastern Illinois University. In these times of high demands for the tax dollar, it is important for all of us who feel as I do, to help in every way possible."

"The Tenth Decade" campaign was Eastern's first university-wide, professionally-organized fund raising effort.

In a letter seeking support from alumni and friends, he said, "Since EI Normal School opened its door, welcoming eager small-town and farm youth, her influence has undoubtedly been felt around the world . . . This semi-barbarian got the word and has felt the graciousness through 60 years. Unknowingly, we all were shaped by the medieval, castle-like atmosphere of Old Main and the behavior required by the stateliness of its being."

It was a huge success, reaching its goal eight months early and topping \$7 million. The same year, Ives received Eastern's Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

In accepting his degree from then President Stan Rives, Ives recalled his days on campus as pleasant ones. He told of Booth, Ford and Thomas -- names that are nothing but buildings to Eastern students today. He brought Lord alive as a "philosopher" who was

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basically interested in young people.

He cited the following faculty members as persons he particularly admired: President Lord, Dr. Glenn Seymour, Miss Josephine Booth, Professor Freiderich Koch, who wrote the music for the Alma Mater; and coach Charles P. Lantz.

Ives described Lord as an archetype of a gentleman and educator. He recalled Seymour as the man who encouraged him to listen to operatic recordings in his home.

Booth, he said, "helped open the world of books through a library usage course." Koch "encouraged me to pursue music" and Lantz was "a fine gentleman and coach."

In 1986, he presented a benefit concert on Eastern's campus on behalf of the "Make Room for Art" campaign to raise funds for the art studio building through the "Tenth Decade" campaign of which he was honorary chairman.

The world renowned folk singer and actor, 76 years old, walked on stage at McAfee gym at Eastern only 23 days after undergoing cataract surgery on his left eye.

His doctor had recommended that Ives wait at least a month before taking the stage again. He did cancel other appearances, but not the benefit for Eastern.

The campaign enabled the university to construct the new studios for visual art graduate students and faculty.

Eastern awarded Ives its Distinguished Alumnus Award in 1987 during Homecoming festivities. Due to the ill health of his

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daughter, Ives was unable to attend.

Then, in 1988 he was nominated by President Rives and selected by American Association of State Colleges and Universities as recipient of its Distinguished Alumnus Award for his "contributions to the cultural and intellectual life of the nation and the world." The Distinguished Alumnus Award was first presented to President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1972, and Ives was the first to be recognized for cultural contributions in the award's 16-year history.

In October, 1989, approval was given by the Board of Governors Universities to name the new art building Ives Hall.

In 1990, Burl Ives returned to Eastern to participate in the formal dedication of the new art studio hall named after him and to give a special benefit performance to raise funds for the university's art department and the art studio hall. He and his wife made a major monetary contribution to the campaign.

The following year, Ives and his wife made a major contribution of memorabilia from his renowned acting and singing career to EIU. The guitar, the famous balladeer used in several of his early movies and the suit he wore in the role of Big Daddy in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" were among the items contributed.

Upon hearing of Ives death, Eastern President David Jorns said, "I am a theater person and watched Mr. Ives for years. I

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was very impressed when he played Big Daddy in 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' and as a youngster grew up with his music. His death is a personal loss and a loss for Eastern."

In 1976, Ives received the Order of Lincoln Medallion from the Lincoln Academy of Illinois, the state's highest honor. The award is given to individuals, who were born or have resided in Illinois, for their accomplishments over a lifetime.